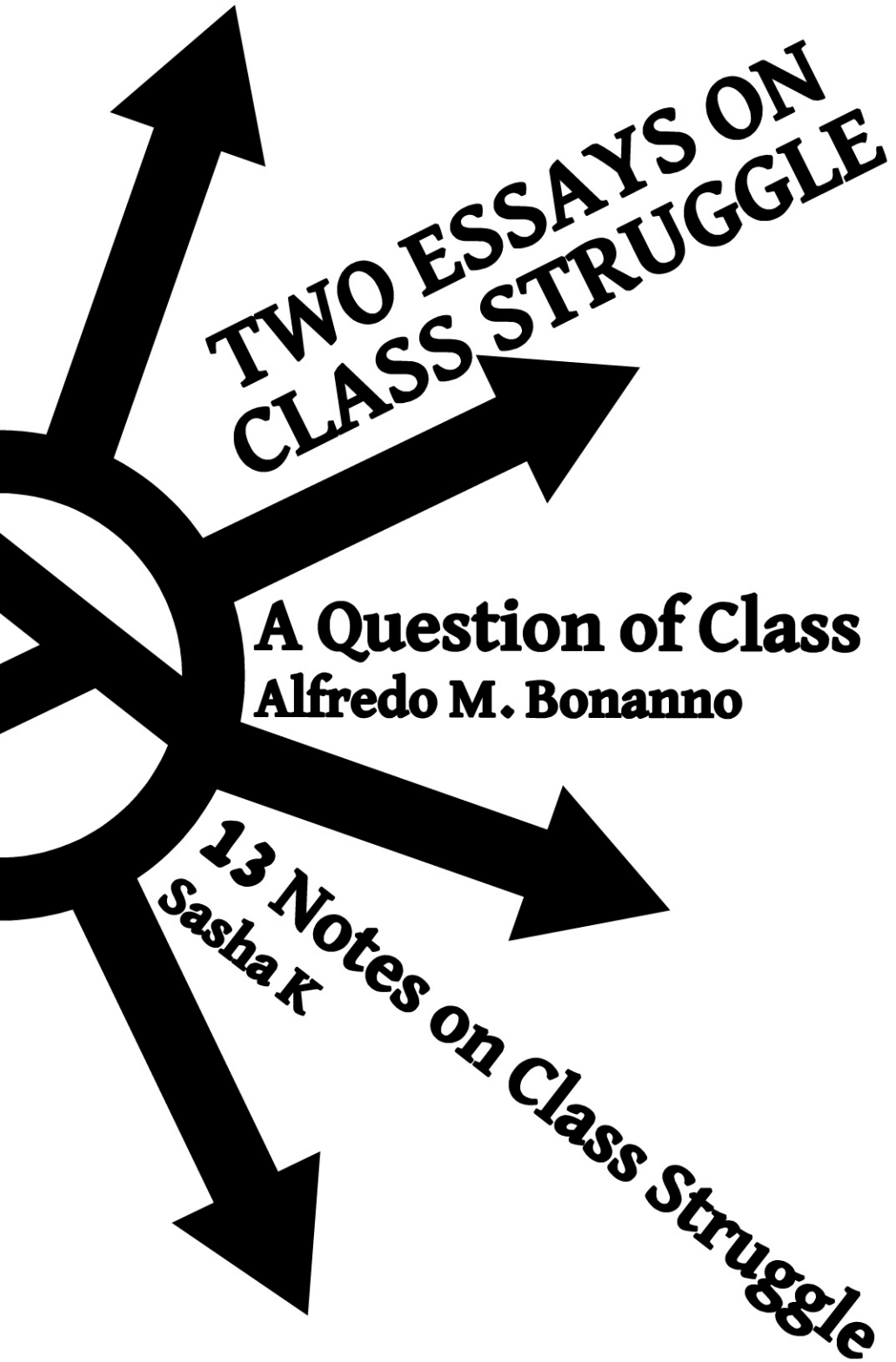
TWO ESSAYS ON CLASS STRUGGLE
A Question of Class
Alfredo M. Bonanno
13 Notes on Class Struggle
Sasha K

Thirteen Notes on Class Struggle for Discussion

Sasha K.

Classes have existed since the beginning of civilization. Civilization has always been a class society.

Class is not just an economic category, it is social. Class relations structure and discipline the whole of society, not just the economy.

Class social relations have always been linked to a series of other oppressions such as patriarchal social relations and different forms of racism.

Classes are one of the primary structures organizing all societies since the beginning of civilization, although the form of class has changed through the development of civilization. This development of class society and social relations has always been intimately linked to the development of technology (thus I call society a "socio-technological regime"). As class society develops so too does social specialization and its technologies. A deep critique of society should always include a critique of class social relations and their links to the dominant material culture of that society, including the technologies that it both makes possible and that make it possible.

Class struggle has existed since classes have existed.

Class struggle exists even when people don't recognize that they are taking part in it. It exists throughout daily life. One of the ways revolutionaries can intervene in class struggle, therefore, is to help people recognize that that is what they are doing. There are many ways to do this and we need to be creative.

When revolutionary, the dispossessed class struggles to end the existence of all classes, although often leftist managers of revolt attempt to channel class struggle to recuperate it to capitalist ends in

order to put themselves into power over others and into a position to benefit materially. For true revolutionaries, those who really attempt to end the rule over life by the state, capitalism and all commodity relations, the discipline of work, patriarchy and the socio-technological regime the auto-destruction of the proletariat/dispossessed as a class is the goal, not for one class (the dispossessed/proletariat) to take over the position of another class (the capitalist or ruling class).

The point of class struggle is not to claim workers are better people than capitalists, to morally judge each class, or to celebrate one class over another, but to destroy the social institution of classes as a whole. Class struggle originates in the contradiction between our desires and the way class structures limit, control, exclude and exploit our life. Our struggle begins with our desires to live in a different way, to break out of class society's disciplining control. Yet the recuperation of class struggle will continue in various guises as long as class relations exist, but this should not make us give up on class struggle, it should make us more careful in our analysis and more creative in the fight for our lives.

Class struggle is always global as is capitalism, but it is often recuperated by nationalist forms. We need to find where the revolutionary content of class struggle pushes to break from the nationalist form and put our force behind such a move. Thus it is not simply a matter of ignoring national liberation movements nor certainly of celebrating them but of critical and revolutionary solidarity with the force of class struggle that pushes for the complete destruction of class relations.

The root of class struggle is not to be found in economics. Production is not just economic either: it doesn't only take place in factories, but spreads over society as a process of social production and reproduction that includes the control and discipline of workers as well as all other members of society. It is this whole social factory which produces social roles, relations and subjectivities, disciplines our

bodies and our minds, and transforms and controls life itself, that we aim to destroy.

The would-be leftist managers of class struggle usually try to transform class struggle into an economic struggle, a struggle for greater economic power, for a bigger piece of the pie, for a slight reorganization of the economy. This is the basis for the creation of the leftist bureaucracies, parties and unions, this is their lifeblood. Yet since classes aren't economic as much as social in character, for class struggle to be truly radical, for it to move towards the ending of classes as such, it must break away from economic goals and from the leftist managers that push them.

The synthesis of all struggle under one organization makes struggle particularly susceptible to control by leftist managers. Thus for class struggle to maintain its radical force it must remain autonomous, self-managed and self-organized, it must become uncontrolled and uncontrollable, and it must spread and deepen socially. The goal of the dispossessed's revolution is never economic, it is anti-economic, it pushes to break out of and destroy economy, all commodity exchange, and the mediation of relationships by all forms of money, ideology and morality.

Work is a disciplined behavior within economy. As an activity, it is separated from other aspects of life and into the sphere of economy. As class society has developed and transformed, work has been further and further alienated from our life and our desires. It becomes an activity that disciplines and oppresses us, an activity that we can't control, that instead controls us. The revolutionary class struggle of the dispossessed fights to break all the separations imposed upon us by class society: the separation between ourselves and our activity, between work and play, and between ourselves and those with whom we interact.

Within the transforming capitalist system, different regimes of accumulation have organized how the capitalist class accumulates capital through the exploitation of the labor and energy of the exploited, excluded and dispossessed. Regimes of accumulation are different forms of capitalist labor discipline and organization. In the US and much of Europe, most of the 20th century operated under the Fordist regime of accumulation (this is named after Ford's model of production and its ideology was Keynesianism). Beginning in the 1970s, that regime was replaced by the regime of flexible accumulation (temping, no unions, flexible hours, no guaranteed employment or retirement, outsourcing, the end of welfare, no controls on the movement of capital across borders, the increase in importance of global trade and of technologies of communication, surveillance and control, etc.; its reigning ideology is neo-liberalism and it is often referred to as "globalization").

Many other countries are being pushed to take on the cast off Fordist jobs without the Fordist guarantees for workers (this is true of much of the third-world, for example). But the death of Fordism in some countries does not mean the death of class struggle, only its continued global transformation. This means we need to analyze such transformations and our responses, not that we simply give up on class struggle as some within the anti-civilization milieu seem to be suggesting. The regime of flexible accumulation has been accompanied by an increased financialization and privatization of all forms of social life and the increased commodification of life itself as well as a new looting of the third-world. This has shaped the character of present day class struggle. This transformation of capitalism and class relations should point out new targets for intervention (social, material, technological, etc.) and new contradictions of class society to exploit.

As anarchists or revolutionaries, it is not up to us to invent, produce or manage class struggle. Class struggle will continue to occur whether we acknowledge it or not. We can intervene in class struggle,

but we don't make it up in entirety. The question, therefore, is not whether we should recognize class struggle or not, but always, how do we intervene in class struggle which will continue whether we intervene or not.

Since civilization through all its transformations has always been a class society, the destruction of classes as such through the revolutionary class struggle of the dispossessed will always be a central goal of anti-civilization anarchism. This is one aspect that separates revolutionary activity from the bland leftist managers of revolt who often hang around revolutionary movements hoping to discipline and channel the force of class struggle to their own ends, saving capitalism and all its separations and alienations in the process.

A Question of Class

Alfredo Bonanno

Contrary to what many believe, class is not a marxist concept. While we reject the marxist claims as to the historic role of the industrial working class above all the other exploited, it is obvious that society is still divided into opposing classes. The terms of this division are changing with the modification of capital. It is important to recognise this in order to address our attack towards the right objectives in the struggle.

Many anarchists believe that the idea of "class" is a marxist concept, therefore they have no interest in it and they try to work out other ways of accounting for social divisions.

These divisions clearly exist. Conflict and suffering dominate present day reality. The great masses who support the profiteers and their henchmen are barely managing to survive themselves.

It is therefore necessary to trace the outlines of the groupings or individuals who share the same economic, political and cultural social situation, no matter how difficult that may be.

It is true that the term "class" has been dominated by marxist mystification for the past forty years. This is not so much in Marx's identification of classes, as his claim that the industrial working class were historically destined to bring about not only their own liberation, but also that of the whole of humanity, through the guidance of the party that claimed to represent it.

Any anarchist can see how absurd and mistaken this concept of class is. But we should remember that this is not so much to do with the concept of class, as the deterministic and messianic role that was thrust upon the industrial working class.

We think that the concept of class is not only valid, but necessary. It is an instrument to guide us through the flux of the various aspects of social reality. What we are not interested in are the mythical claims about the destiny of the industrial working class.

One thing we can say with certainty is that the productive structures that defined class divisions in the recent past are now undergoing profound changes. What is also certain is that although different in many respects, a conflict which is just as bitter is being reproduced. The problem is to see how this is happening. What are we dealing with today? What marks the boundary between the dominating part of humanity and the rest?

This is such an important question that it puts the need to study intermediate strata into second place for the time being. Equally unimportant — for the time being — is the need to consider a repartition into three or more classes. What interests us now is the progressive disappearance of traditional class divisions and the emergence of a new one. Clearly such an argument needs more space than we can dedicate to it here, but we shall do the best we can. The preceding class division was based on a "lack". There was something that was considered the "common good" which was divided into unequal parts. The class in power took possession of the greater part of this good (commonly known as wealth), and from this unjust profit drew the means to continue exploitation and domination. In the first place these were the cultural- and ideological means on which a whole scale of values was based and which condemned the expropriated mass to what seemed an irreversible situation.

In fact, the profound contradictions within the system itself had just as radical effect on it as the struggle against such forms of domination. Recurring social problems were solved by improving working conditions.

The situation was becoming intolerable for capital and it had to strengthen its structures by increasing collaboration between States: But it has been advanced technology that has made a decisive impact by making the restructuring of production possible.

We are now heading towards a radically different situation. The question of "lack" is becoming more hazy, while the question of "possession" is emerging. Class difference is no longer created by not possessing "as much" as the other, but by the fact — unique in the history of mankind — that one part possesses "something" that the other does not.

To understand this better we must remember that in the past the exploited class always "possessed" something, even if it was only their "working strength", i.e. their capacity to produce. They were always forced to sell it, that is true, and often at a very low price, but the other side always needed it. The bargaining could even reach the point of these miserable vendors of their labour power being grabbed by the scruff of the neck, but no one could deny that the working class had a "possession" that was part of the same scale of values as that of the dominant class. In the past, exploiters and exploited faced each other (also within the considerable range of class stratifications) on the basis of a "possession" that was common to both, but owned unequally. Now one side possesses something that the other does not, and never will.

This "thing" is technology: the technological management of dominion, the construction of an exclusive "language" belonging to a class of "included". They are surrounding themselves with a great wall that is far higher than the one in the past that consisted of material wealth and was defended by bodyguards and safes. This wall will be a radical separation, so clear cut as to be incomprehensible — in the short term — to those who do not find themselves within the process of inclusion. The remainder, the "excluded" will become a class of external "beneficiaries", capable only of using secondary technology

and perfectly instrumental to the project of dominion.

The "excluded" part of humanity will not be able, at least for a very long time to come, to realise what has been taken from them, because it will be a product that no longer belongs to the same scale of values. In building this new and, they hope, final separation, they are also building a new moral code that no longer belongs to the same scale of values, a kind of moral code that it no longer intends to share with others, with those who belong to the world of the excluded. In the past the Achille's heel was precisely this moral code. It was useful in many ways towards ensuring better control, but it often resulted in the exploiters feeling the hot breath of their followers on the back of their necks.

So this new situation that is on the road to completion is building new class structures but is not abolishing the concept of class. This is not a question of terminology, but an operational necessity. At the moment the concept of class-and that related to "class conflict" seem quite adequate for indicating the processes of social structures and how they function. In the same way it is still possible to use the concept of "class consciousness" in the face of the increasing difficulty that the "excluded" are faced with concerning their own condition of exclusion.

Every revolutionary strategy we can imagine for resistance against the process of restructuring in course should bear in mind the modifications that are underway and, within certain limits, the stratification within the classes themselves. Perhaps in this early phase the margins of the included class (the enemy class) are not easy to define. We will therefore have to address our attack towards objectives that are more obvious. But this is only a question of documentation and analysis.

What is more important at this stage is to show that discussions on terminology are not going to solve the problem of finding the enemy and unmasking it. A persistence in doing this merely hides the incapacity to act.

An Invitation to Revolt…

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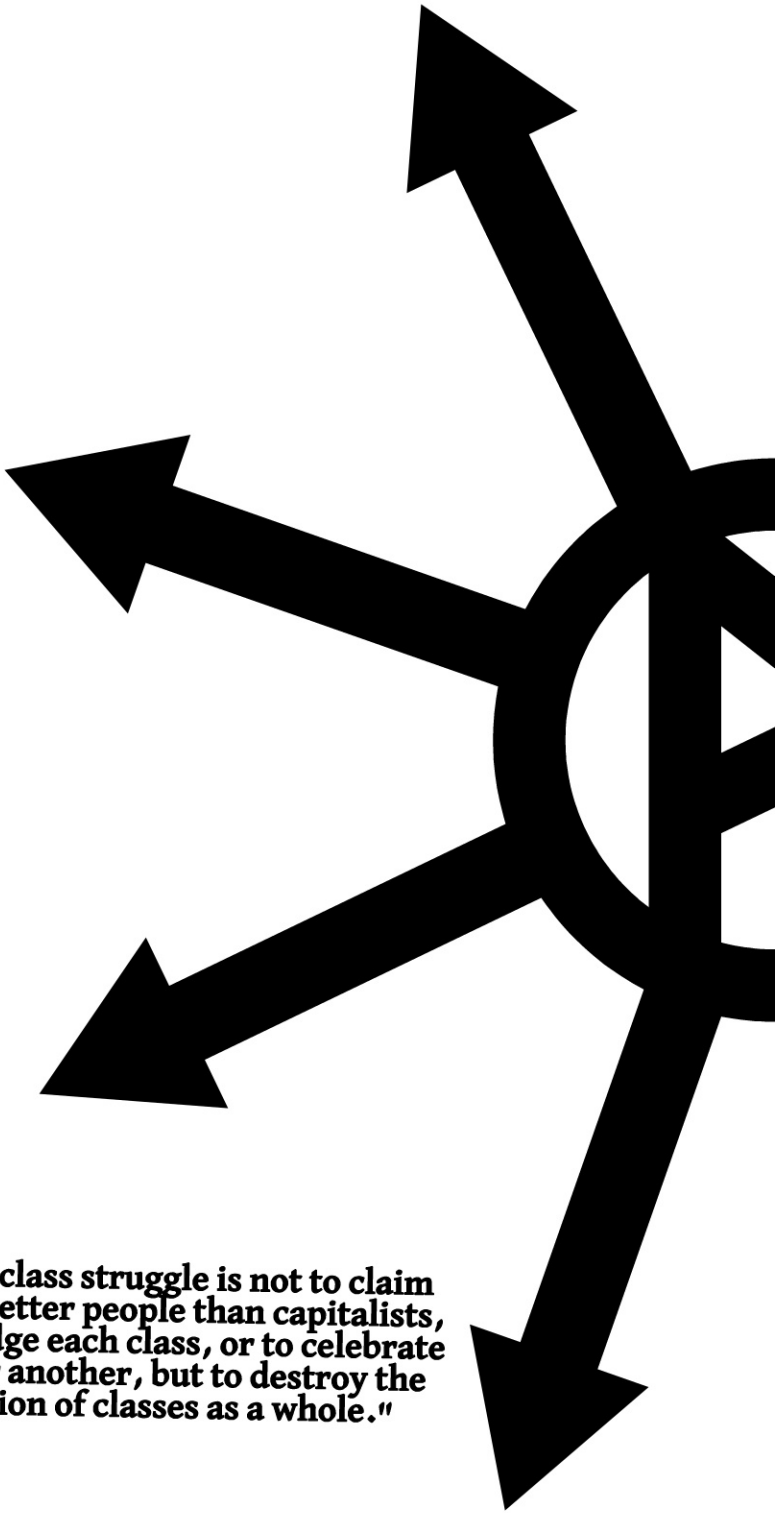

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